



News Release

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Economy Has Utahns Avoiding Cancer Screenings

SALT LAKE CITY – In these tight economic times, physicians are reporting their patients are delaying routine cancer screenings due to cost. This has officials at the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and Utah Cancer Action Network (UCAN) concerned, particularly about colon cancer screening.

“Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related death in the United States and Utah,” said Bronwen Calver, UDOH Comprehensive Cancer Coordinator.

“It’s alarming that nearly 45 percent of Utahns age 50 and older have never been screened for it.”

An estimated 32,000 or more Utahns ages 50 to 64 do not have any health insurance. In 2007, nearly 80 percent of this group reported they had either never had a sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy – or that it had been more than five years since their last screening.

Without insurance, a colonoscopy can cost from \$1,000 to \$2,000. There is currently no program to subsidize the cost of the procedure for low income individuals who are uninsured or underinsured.

UCAN members are currently exploring ways to provide free or low-cost colonoscopies for low-income citizens.

“Colon cancer found in its earliest stages has a 90 percent five-year survival rate,” said Dr. Joe Eyring, chair of the UCAN Colon Cancer Committee and a colorectal surgeon.

“Delaying screening only increases the chances a more advanced cancer will be found later.”

Routine colon cancer screening should begin at age 50 with a colonoscopy every 10 years. There are other screening options, including the once-a-year Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT), which is provided for free by the UDOH and performed in the privacy of your home. There is also the less-expensive sigmoidoscopy, which scopes only the lower half of the colon and is done every five years. But the most accurate test is the colonoscopy.

Most colonoscopies are covered by insurance, although a co-pay or deductible may be required. The UCAN Colon Cancer Committee is urging businesses to review their benefits packages to make sure they include colonoscopy for employees 50 and older. Early intervention reduces cost, days lost to illness, and keeps workers productive.

“Study after study shows that treating colon cancer in its earliest stages not only saves lives, but also saves money,” said Calver. “A stage I or II colon cancer may cost \$30,000 to treat, but a late stage III or IV colon cancer can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars with a low five-year survival rate.”

Erin Day, a colon cancer survivor, asks people to “think of a colonoscopy as a long-term investment in your continued good health.”

For additional information or for a free FOBT kit, contact the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Health Resource line at 1-888-222-2542.

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